

MATTHIESSEN & HEGELER
ZINC COMPANY RECORDS

LaSalle, Illinois

Leah Weisse
Amy Sharer

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INTRODUCTION

Cynthia and Frederick Carus, on March 1 and 15 and on October 31, 1984, donated the Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc Company's records to the Earl W. Hayter Regional History Center.

Property rights to the collection belong to the Regional History Center; literary rights are dedicated to the public. There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Linear feet of shelf space: 73 linear feet
Number of containers: 68 boxes
Earl W. Hayter Regional History Center
Regional Collection 167

Processed by: Amy Sharer and Leah Weisse, Curator
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SCOPE AND CONTENT

Records in the Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc Company collection document the company's activities from its founding in 1858 to its dissolution in 1978. The collection is organized into ten series: General Corporate Information; Financial Information; Property and Production Information; Employee Records; Stock Information; Tax and Banking Information; Correspondence, Legal and Government Documents, Insurance; Sales and Contracts; Subsidiary Companies; Photos, Maps and Blueprints. Some items are in German.

The GENERAL CORPORATE INFORMATION series is divided into three subseries: Governance Papers; Minutes of Executive and Managing Committees; Minutes of Board of Directors. This series documents the company's organization in the Nineteenth Century and its reorganization after declaring bankruptcy in 1935. Additional bankruptcy records are located in boxes 51 and 52. Two company histories are in box one, folder one.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION, the second series, contains the company's financial records from 1863 to 1978. This series is divided into four subseries: Corporate Accounts; Ledgers and Journals; Reports; Financial Statements. Records in this series include cash books, sundry personal accounts, general ledgers and auditor's reports. In addition, some annual reports are located in the Reports subseries.

The third series, PROPERTY and PRODUCTION INFORMATION, is divided into four subseries: Property, Depreciation and Appraisal; Deeds and Leases; Production Ledgers and Statistics; Production Papers and Patents. Information contained in this series includes plant and equipment values, production levels and costs, reports on research and patents for production innovations. The original deeds and leases to land in LaSalle, Illinois and other sites are in the Deeds and Leases subseries.

EMPLOYEE RECORDS, the fourth series, contains material on salaries, wages, benefits and unions. This series is organized into three subseries: Salary and Wage Information; Safety and Accident Information; Union and Labor Information. Accident reports, retirement trusts and labor costs are included in this series.

The STOCK INFORMATION series contains stockholder's minutes, registers, stock certificates and ledgers within two subseries: Stockholder's Minutes and Certificates; Dividend and Transfer Information. It is followed by the TAX and BANKING INFORMATION series which is divided into three subseries: Tax Information; Bank Books, Notes and Bonds; Bankruptcy Information. In addition to tax returns and bank books, the series contains bondholder lists and bond assignments that are related to the material in the Bankruptcy Information subseries.

CORRESPONDENCE, LEGAL and GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS, and INSURANCE is the seventh series. It is organized into four subseries, according to type of record. Some of the material in the Correspondence subseries is in German. The Legal Documents subseries contains material on Matthiessen's estate and lawsuit decrees. Most of the Government Documents subseries is composed of reports to and from Federal commissions. The Insurance

subseries includes policies covering employee liability and compensation in addition to fire and equipment insurance.

The eighth series contains SALES and CONTRACTS. A majority of the material in the Sales subseries dates from 1884 to 1902. The Contracts subseries is composed of contracts with federal, state and city governments and also over 1,000 business contracts that date 1890-1970. An index to the business contracts follows this inventory.

Records from sixteen SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES comprise the ninth series. Subseries are composed of records from individual subsidiaries. The information, which varies from company to company, includes incorporation papers, contracts, stock information and financial records.

The last series is composed of PHOTOS, MAPS and BLUEPRINTS. The number of photographs is given in parentheses following the folder title. Maps and Blueprints are in oversize folders. Some of the maps are fragile and difficult to handle. They outline coal veins, factory floor plans and the zinc smelting process.

Researchers are encouraged to consult related collections, especially those dealing with the industry and economy of LaSalle and Peru such as the Westclox Incorporated Records (RC 116) and the Illinois Valley Area Chamber of Commerce Records (RC 156).

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc Company of LaSalle, Illinois, was founded in 1858 by Frederick W. Matthiessen and Edward C. Hegeler, two mining engineers who had emigrated to the United States from Germany in 1856. The founders chose the site in LaSalle because of its central location to midwestern zinc ore deposits and the vast availability of coal on that site. The company remained in business producing zinc and zinc products until its dissolution in 1978.

What began as a zinc smelting operation soon grew to include many other enterprises as well. In 1865, Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc opened America's first rolling mill for the production of sheet zinc. The need for coal in both the smelting and rolling operations caused the company to begin mining coal on the premises in 1874. For this project, the company recruited miners from Silesia, Ireland, Wales, Austria and Germany. These immigrants joined zinc engineers who had been recruited from mining academies throughout Europe. In 1875, the company began operating its own rail line, the LaSalle and Bureau County Railroad, which linked the company to the junction of the Illinois Central and the Chicago, Peoria, and Quincy rail lines. A technological breakthrough by Otto Proelss, a company engineer, caused Matthiessen and Hegeler to begin producing in 1881 sulfuric and nitric acid from sulfur dioxide, a by-product of the zinc smelting process.

Technological innovation was responsible for other highlights of the company's history. In 1856, when Matthiessen and Hegeler invented a new smelting process, they were using the facilities of the Lehigh Zinc Company of Friedensville, Pennsylvania. They took this process with them to LaSalle and built the Hegeler Retort Furnace which became standard in the zinc industry. Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc maintained its technological advantage over the competition by continually perfecting the process and being granted new patents until 1966.

Other major events in company history include the recapitalization of the company in 1925 through the sale of 6% gold bonds with a maturity date of 1935. Its subsequent bankruptcy and reorganization occurred in 1935 because of the company's inability to pay off the maturity value of the bonds. The only strike in company history occurred in early 1937 when Local 80 of the Mine, Mill and Spelter Workers Union halted production in the plant for nearly four months until July of 1937.

Beginning in 1868 and continuing into the 1960's, Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc purchased companies which aided in the production and distribution of zinc and chemical products. Among these companies were the Zinc Roofing and Ornamenting Company, Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc of Missouri, Meadowbrook Corporation, and Sherbrooke Metallurgical Company, Canada.

The company celebrated its centennial in 1958 under the leadership of Herman D. Carus, grandson of Edward Hegeler. Throughout its history, Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc has been operated by decedents of Edward Hegeler and his daughter, Mary Hegeler Carus, who succeeded her father as president in 1903. Company superintendent George Weerts oversaw daily operations of the company during most of Hegeler's presidency and the presidency of Mary Carus as well. Joseph Brennemann was the

chief financial officer for the corporation from 1890 until 1920 and served as its president from 1920 to 1924 between the terms of office of Mary Carus. He was the first non-family member to hold that office. Though the company was dissolved in 1978, the premises are currently being utilized for zinc production by Hegeler's great grandson Fred Carus and his wife, Cynthia. The Carus's operate LaSalle Rolling Mills which produces zinc centers for copper pennies, and Zinco, Inc., which produces zinc wire for use in metallizing.